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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/08/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ABLD](#) [CVIS](#) [OEXC](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: ROK VICE FOREIGN MINISTER SHIN ON VISA WAIVER,
WEST INITIATIVE, NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a courtesy call by the Ambassador October 6, Second Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo described the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) as an example of an area of strengthening ROK-U.S. ties. He said that MOFAT's Consular Affairs Bureau planned to start a public relations campaign both online and using advertisements in advance of Korea's entry into the program. The VFM also expressed confidence in both the security and popular acceptance of Korean e-passports, issuance of which had commenced in August in order to qualify for VWP. Regarding the Work English Study Travel (WEST) program, VFM Shin emphasized President Lee's personal interest in the initiative's success and said that identification by the U.S. side of high-quality agencies able to find good work opportunities for applicants would be key to the program's effectiveness. The ROKG, he added, was considering providing financial assistance for low-income WEST applicants. The Ambassador suggested short-term exchanges involving returned Peace Corps volunteers might be another way to further enhance bilateral person-to-person ties. VFM Shin expressed understanding of post's desire to finalize agreements allowing for the construction of the New Embassy Compound at the Camp Coiner site and pledged to continue to do what he could to encourage progress. END SUMMARY.

MANAGING VWP EXPECTATIONS

¶2. (C) Ambassador Stephens made a courtesy call on ROK Second Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo on October 6 at MOFAT. Welcoming her by stating that her arrival in Seoul was "good news for bilateral ties," VFM Shin told the Ambassador that U.S.-ROK relations had been smooth under the Lee Myung-bak administration. The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) was an example of an area of strengthening bilateral relations, he said, adding that he hoped Korean travelers would be able to start visiting the U.S. without visas beginning in early 2009 as anticipated.

¶3. (C) Told that post was thinking about how best to manage expectations about Korea's entry into VWP, VFM Shin said that MOFAT's Consular Affairs Bureau was also planning a public relations campaign both online and using advertisements to "expose Koreans to the true meaning of the VWP." Geared to prevent misunderstandings about the program, the PR effort would, for example, stress that visas will continue to be necessary for travel to the U.S. for educational or work purposes. VFM Shin said the campaign might also address misperceptions about information exchanged as part of the program. The Ambassador assured the VFM that post would likewise do what it could to ensure the public is well-informed about VWP.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador having brought up a local news article about the security of personal information in Korea's new electronic passports, VFM Shin said the passports were very secure and expressed confidence that the majority of Koreans

would accept them. The ROK began issuing e-passports in August to meet one of the requirements for VWP entry. While there were bound to be questions from the public about the security of personal information in the e-passports, he continued, the fact that citizens were concerned with holding the government accountable was a sign of a healthy democracy.

In response to a question from VFM Shin about whether the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) would be ready to handle the new VWP travelers as scheduled, Consul General Julia Stanley said the Department of Homeland Security had made assurances it would by the end of the year.

GOOD AGENCIES, OPPORTUNITIES CRITICAL TO WEST SUCCESS

15. (C) Turning to the Work English Study Travel (WEST) program, VFM Shin described how President Lee had taken a personal interest in the initiative, directing MOFAT to draw up concrete implementation plans. Inter-agency meetings had subsequently produced a roadmap for the program. The VFM emphasized that the ROKG wanted the U.S. side to identify capable agencies able to find good work opportunities for program applicants. This would be key to the success of the program, he said.

16. (C) VFM Shin listed several ways in which he thought the WEST program would have a positive impact: 1) It would provide young Koreans with the opportunity to learn English, 2) it would allow for a more effective means of learning English (i.e. immersion in a working environment), and 3) it would ensure person-to-person bonds between Americans and Koreans are perpetuated in future generations. The ROKG was E

considering providing financial assistance to low-income WEST applicants, VFM added, to supplement the money they would earn while on the program.

RPCV EXCHANGES?

17. (C) The Ambassador suggested to VFM Shin that short-term exchanges involving returned Peace Corps volunteers who had served in Korea may be another way to enhance bilateral exchange at the person-to-person level. Such exchanges might allow RPCVs to return to Korea, the Ambassador said, and do collaborative work, perhaps, with Koreans in common professions.

NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND

18. (C) The Ambassador expressed appreciation for President Lee having raised the issue of the New Embassy Compound (NEC) location during her meeting with him earlier the same day (ref SEOUL 001957). VFM Shin indicated that he was quite familiar with the issue, having tried to engineer a breakthrough on the matter earlier in another assignment. He pledged to continue to do what he could to encourage progress toward finalizing the Camp Coiner site for the NEC.
STEPHENS